

Fact Sheet

Proposed Withdrawal from Mineral Entry in Sagebrush Focal Areas

Background: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) identified habitat disturbance and fragmentation caused by certain hardrock mining operations as a threat to Greater Sage-Grouse habitat. As a result, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land use plans recommend that the Secretary of the Interior exercise her authority under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) to safeguard the most important landscapes identified by BLM and USFS, with advice from the FWS, within Priority Habitat Management Areas – identified as Sagebrush Focal Areas – by withdrawing them from the operation of the hardrock mining laws.

Through a public, transparent process, the Interior Department is seeking to ensure that the Sagebrush Focal Areas that anchor the range-wide conservation strategy for the Greater Sage-Grouse are protected from the threat of hardrock mining, subject to valid existing rights.

The elements of the proposed mineral withdrawal include:

Temporary segregation: Subject to valid existing rights, the Interior Department temporarily segregated approximately 10 million acres of public and National Forest System lands located in the states of Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Wyoming from location and entry under the United States mining laws. This segregation, which began on September 24, 2015, and lasts up to two years until the Secretary decides whether to make the withdrawal, prohibits the location of new mining claims in the designated areas.

Valid, pre-existing claims: Neither the segregation for up to two years, nor any subsequent withdrawal, would prohibit ongoing or future mining exploration or extraction operations on valid pre-existing mining claims. Neither the segregation nor the proposed withdrawal would prohibit any other authorized uses on these lands. Under FLPMA, the Secretary can withdraw these lands for a maximum of 20 years and may extend the period in the future, after additional public review.

Public Review: During the segregation period, the BLM is conducting environmental and other public review regarding the mineral potential in the area proposed for withdrawal, including rare earths, as well as the importance of these areas as Greater Sage-Grouse habitat. This public process, conducted in compliance with FLPMA and the National Environmental Policy Act, includes participation by the public, tribes, environmental groups, industry, state and local government, as well as other stakeholders.

Alternatives: To address issues identified during the public scoping period, the BLM has developed a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that analyzes five alternatives. The BLM will identify a preferred alternative in the Final EIS. The alternatives are:

- ***No Action:*** This represents the baseline that all alternatives are compared to and would continue management of locatable mineral exploration and development in accordance with existing plans, programs, policies, and regulations in the proposed withdrawal area. Most of the area remains open to mining in this alternative.
- ***Proposed Action:*** Under the Proposed Action, approximately 10 million acres of federal locatable minerals in Sagebrush Focal Areas (SFAs) in six western states would be withdrawn from U.S. mining laws, subject to valid existing rights.
- ***State of Nevada Alternative:*** This alternative, suggested by the State of Nevada, would refine the areas proposed for withdrawal in the State of Nevada, substituting 387,981 acres of high value habitat adjacent to SFAs for 487,756 acres of high mineral potential within the proposed withdrawal areas.
- ***Remove Areas of High Mineral Potential:*** This alternative would remove 558,918 acres with high mineral potential within the SFAs in the six states from the proposed withdrawal.
- ***State of Idaho Alternative:*** This alternative, suggested by the Governor of Idaho, would remove 538,742 acres of high and moderate mineral potential in Idaho, including a buffer to simplify geographic and administrative boundaries, from the proposed withdrawal.

BLM